

# Conflict and Workers' Morale in Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT :** This piece of work theoretically discussed workers' morale and conflict in manufacturing companies in Rivers State with specific elaborations on: the meaning of conflict, workers' morale, causes and types of conflict, review of extant literature on conflict and workers' morale, conflict management, impacts and the relationship between conflict and workers' morale in manufacturing companies in Rivers State. Theoretical framework was based on the traditional and contemporary theories of conflict, the basis of which the study found that, just like death, conflicts are omnipresent and inevitable in life and abounds in manufacturing companies in Rivers State as virtually every sphere of the organizations gets ravaged by one form of conflict or the other ranging from: interpersonal/intergroup conflict, intrapersonal/group conflict, intra-organizational, constructive or functional conflict, dysfunctional or destructive conflicts. It was deduced that conflicts occur in organizations as a result of: incompatible goals, different values and beliefs, inconsistent evaluation and reward system, communication problems, struggle for power, authority/control, and leadership style, scarcity of common resources, organizational demands and self-worth demands. It was also found that if a conflict is not aptly and promptly managed, it can lead to truncated or reduced workers' morale causing decreased productivity, failure to attain set goals, absenteeism, low service delivery, profit reduction, frustration, anger, fear, distrust or resentment amongst the workers'. Again, the nature of the conflict, though, determines how best it could be managed and conflict can sometimes yield positive workers' morale or result if well managed, meaning that not all conflict situations are negatively inclined. The recommendation is that efforts should constantly be made to ensure that the causes of conflicts are handled timely as apt detection and handling of conflicting parties/issues will resolve concerns amicably. Workers should be oriented with the importance of peaceful coexistence in the workplace as coercion or intimidation will only lead to counter productivity/low morale. It is suggested that this study be repeated in different organizational setting and in other states in Nigeria. This findings and recommendations would provide good practical and theoretical background for conflict management in organizations in future.

**Keywords:** Conflict, workers' morale, conflict management, and manufacturing companies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a multifaceted or dynamic social process or concept which is evident in virtually every facet of human existence. According to Thomas's (1992) model, conflict is dynamic in the sense that it is continuous: in

organizations(Woodland,1990), human life, and inherent in global day to day functioning inclusive of the day to day functioning of the manufacturing companies in Rivers State – Nigeria. Since individuals working in the organization are of diverse race, nationality, religion, belief system, customs and family background, there is definitely bound to be disagreements amongst them. But these disagreements might not always lead to conflict except they are such that is capable of posing a threat or disrupting the attainment of the set goals or objectives of the organization.

Conflict has acquired a multitude of connotations, producing all-encompassing vagueness and leaving many intellectuals and administrators quite unclear about its actual meaning, relevance, how best to cope with it and how best to curtail its impact on the organizational goal as well as the impact on the morale of the workers. However, conflict could be described as a process in which one party, individual, group or organization disagrees with the opinions, interests of another or put forward that its interests, welfare or benefits or privacy have been trampled upon or opposed by another, such that unhealthy rivalry emerges thereby obstructing the free flow of job performance and hinders the attainment of the organizational goals or objectives (Certo, 2013).

Conflict between or within individuals, groups or organizations emerge for numerous reasons, some of which comprises: incompatible goals, dissimilar values and beliefs, ambiguity and role conflict, problems of communications, unclear rules, authority/power tussle, uneven evaluation and reward system, job stress, task ambiguity, lack or insufficiency of information system, etc., which in turn can affect the managers and workers' morale and satisfaction (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012). Disparities amongst workers in an organization can arise in the cause of several human resource activities such as: postings, transfers, promotions, bonuses, rewards, increments, work conditions/designs and other related benefits and privileges. Conflict may also erupt when an individual expresses some intrinsic attributes like: greed, covetousness, self-centeredness, discontent, envy, arrogance, rudeness, impunity, etc, which are capable of creating a breakdown of human relationships. At the professional level, the rivalries, also exists which can cost the organization some economic, social and financial loss.

But in the opinion of Turner & Weed (1983), conflict generally arise if there is a mismatch between power, organizational demands and self-worth. According to them, power embodies the capacity, resources or influence that people have at their disposal to get work done like personal influence, information, amount of time, space, number of staff, financial discretion and dependency on others. If well managed, power creates an atmosphere of teamwork, cordial relationship but can degenerate to conflict if wrongly used, on ice or totalitarian. Organizational demands on the other hand, depicts people's expectations regarding a worker's job performance or task assigned. When these expectations are dashed or not fulfilled, people feel angry, downcast, let down or cheated and this leads to a conflict situation. Self-worth refers to an individual's self-esteem or value. Every worker wants to prove his/her worth in the organization. Workers may feel loss of self-worth if some basic needs (fair pay, good performance rating or appraisal, promotion, job enrichment, etc) are not fulfilled. Thus, to manage conflict adequately to elate the morale of workers and to attain the organizational goals, Turner & Weed (1983) opined that the three key elements of conflict: Power, organizational demands and self-worth must be matched through organizational activities in order to put an end or control conflict.

Extant studies by Grace (2012), specifies that most manufacturing companies in Rivers State, like Coca cola alongside other local manufacturing companies such as First Aluminum Nigeria Limited – which produces aluminum roofing sheets, Best Aluminum manufacturing company limited, Eastern wrought Iron limited, etc, are continually been affected and their decision equally interfered with by conflict based consequences.

Sometimes, the production sections are continually at loggerheads with the marketing sections. The reason being that the marketers are always demanding for improved quality of their products sequel to complaints from the customers who may request a specific brand be improved further. The production section might not agree, alleging their expertise and superiority in quality judgement. This could result to conflict and this indeed, appears to be the nature of the Nigerian based manufacturing companies influenced by the Nigerian socio-economic system added to high unpredictable politically oriented workplace relations (Grace, 2012).

The organization (manufacturing companies inclusive) is made up of a harmonized or coordinated social unit, formed to operate uninterrupted in order to attain its universal objectives (Freeman, 1999). Conflict in the workplace becomes a menace, an emotional and psychological attack to the morale of the workers if not timely and properly managed. The level of menace spills over to the entire society, organization and individual levels. In terms of the organization, the individual or group workers get negatively affected in the sense that it might result to high turnover rate, loss of income/profit, loss of enthusiasm/vigor on the part of the workers in terms of executing their duties, increase in excuse duties and low productivity/profit margin.

Existing studies equally reveal that conflict severely affects the morale of the workers and the credibility of the concerned organization (Chuang & Ning, 2003). To boost, heighten and strengthen the workers' morale is the key responsibility of the human resource managers and the management of the organization at large. The workers' standing on the high moral grounds are instrumental in the ultimate organizational success (Tjosvold, 2008) and must at all-time be considered as assets to the growth of the organization. Any organization marked with a chain of conflict be it racial, linguistic, ethnic, political, regional or professional, will certainly have negative impacts cast upon the overall organizational dynamics which will be most evident in the behaviors of the workers.

Thus, since conflict is apparently unavoidable, it is obviously very necessary for managers, especially of manufacturing companies in Rivers State to be able to map out strategic measures to identify: the importance of morale, the impact of conflict scenarios on the morale of workers, the sources of the conflict, to envision it's constructive as well as destructive prospective, to learn how to cope with the conflict and to implement conflict resolution techniques in a practical approach (Fleerwood, 1987). This assertion has put many organizations on their toes in terms of continually adjusting and developing diverse methodologies towards managing conflict situations effectively (Oparanma, Hamilton & Ohaka, 2009 because lack of satisfaction and/or high worker morale/enthusiasm on the job reduces organizational performance drastically (Dubrin, 2005).

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this study thus, is to theoretically spell out the impact or effect of conflict on workers' morale in manufacturing companies in Rivers State having each of these two concepts (conflict and workers' morale) briefly elucidated in terms of their: meaning, causes, types, management strategies, effects/impacts of conflict on morale, remedies for low morale where necessary and possible recommendations/conclusions. The research variables include workers' morale as the dependent variable (with enthusiasm and vigor as dimensions) and the independent variable being conflict which selected measures for this study includes: incompatible goals, different values and beliefs, inconsistent evaluation and reward system, poor leadership. Other measures of conflict include: ambiguity and role conflict, problems of communications, ambiguous rules, authority conflict, job stress, task conflict, and deficiency in information systems. Several studies have emerged overtime on conflict and diverse variables. Kazimoto (2013) reviewed literature on leadership styles role in managing conflict within organizations. The outcome of his study recapped the observation of Azamosa (2004), who, having studied industrial conflict in Nigerian tertiary institutions in line with leadership styles in dealing with union oriented conflict, found that the role of

leadership style is significantly domineering to effective conflict and crisis management within tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, despite the litany of studies on conflict and many variables, it does appear that there is no existing concise consideration of the effect or impact of conflict on workers' morale in organizations especially the manufacturing companies in Rivers State.

**Objective of study**

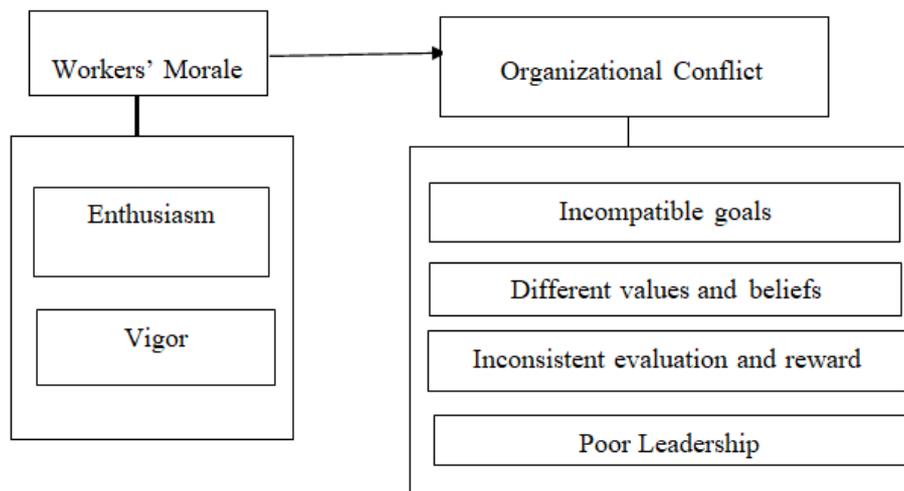
The objective of this study is to ascertain the relationship between workers' morale and the measures of organizational conflict in the following order:

- i. To examine the relationship between workers' morale and incompatible goals.
- ii. To examine the relationship between workers' morale and different values and beliefs.
- iii. To examine the relationship between workers' inconsistent evaluation and reward system.
- iv. To examine the relationship between workers' morale and poor leadership.

Given the foregoing objectives, the following research questions provide a basis for valuation of the relationship between the variables:

- i. What is the relationship between workers' morale and incompatible goals?
- ii. What is the relationship between workers' morale and different values and beliefs?
- iii. What is the relationship between workers' inconsistent evaluation and reward system?
- iv. What is the relationship between workers' morale and poor leadership?

**Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1:** Source: Desktop computer, 2020.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study, there are two cardinal perspectives to conflict suitable for the analysis in this piece of work. One viewpoint theorizes conflict as destructive, unhealthy and a negative situation which must be avoided at all cost. The second perceives conflict as constructive, an aid to team work not an obstacle, having a problem-solving base where those involved are willing to redirect personality differences, to listen to others' views and to be open and candid to each other, to be understanding and accommodating (Albert, 2001).

The constructive school of thought considers conflict as a stimulating opportunity for personal, group and organizational growth as constructively managed conflict encourages a positive performance and elevates high morale while destructive conflict heats up the environment to bring about low worker morale and disruption of the entire group and polarity, reduced productivity on job performance, psychological and physical injury, emotional distress and inability to sleep, interference with problem activities, intensification of differences into aggressive position and malice with associated increased hostility (Akanji, 2005).

No matter which viewpoint one may settle for regarding conflict, it is essential to note that hardly ever would one expect an organization to be in a persistent state of conflict as the foundation for employment or in the organization (Nebgen, 1978). Beheld from an extreme and religious perspective, St. Augustine (1950) stated that conflict epitomizes one of the two natures of man: evil. While cooperation, its opposite, symbolizes the second nature of man which is: the good. This implies that conflict is good and bad, no single theory of it explains it all.

Unfortunately, people seem to notice only the visible aspect of conflict such as: angry words, actions of opposition, quarrel, hatred, destruction, killings, war, etc. But this is only a very minimal aspect of the conflict process (Mashanne & Glinow, 2008). Conflict is said to be multifaceted as it has both negative and positive outcomes bouncing on the company and the workers at large. According to Coser (1956: 31), "groups require disharmony as well as harmony, dissociation as well as association; and conflicts within them are by no means altogether disruptive factors. Far from being necessarily dysfunctional, a certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life."

### **Meaning of conflict**

In literature, like in every dynamic and multifaceted concept, conflict breeds substantial uncertainty and fluctuation in the minds of scholars and administrators on its meaning and relevance and on how best it could be managed or coped with. For the purpose of this study, conflict could be defined as a process in which one party, individual, group or organization disagrees with the opinions, interests of another or put forward that its interests, welfare or benefits or privacy have been trampled upon or opposed by another, such that unhealthy rivalry emerges thereby obstructing the free flow of job performance and hinders the attainment of the organizational goals or objectives (Certo, 2013). Conflict has also been described as an interpersonal difference, or disharmony amongst two or more persons, due to variation in opinion, competition, negative perceptions, poorly defined role expectations or deficiency of communication (Ellis & Abbott, 2011; Marquis & Huston, 2014). In politics, conflict is said to be present when two or more groups involve in a tussle over values and prerogatives to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to nullify, injure or jettison the rivals (Jeong, 2000). In communication, conflict is seen as an articulated struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive irreconcilable goals, scarce rewards and interference from other parties in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). Mughal & Khan (2013), described conflict as a state of scuffle or rivalry amid various person or persons with their opponent (s) or a dispute which arises when the goals, values or interests of diverse individuals or groups are irreconcilable with each other.

### **Measures /causes of conflict**

A key factor that can throw parties into a state of irreconcilability is their perception of the issue at hand or issues of interest. Other features that can give rise conflict in organizations includes: task interdependence, scarce resources, goal incompatibility, communication failures, individual differences and poorly designed reward/incentive system (Mgbekem, 2004). To Barr & Dowding (2012), autocracy, hostility, disrespect, inequities, hierarchy, low morale and absence of shared goals appear to be the triggering factors giving rise to

conflict situations. In Umiker (1998) parlance, common causes of conflict include lack of clarity with expectations or guidelines, poor communication, lack of clear jurisdiction, personality differences, conflicts of interest, and changes within the organization. From the foregoing, deducible causes of conflict thus comprise:

**Incompatible Goals:** Incompatibility in pursuit of individual, group or organizational goal refers to the set of points that cannot be realized because one or more goal-states, points on the goal-dimensions, are irreconcilable with one or more others. These are divergent individual standpoints, group or organizational objectives that are conflicting with each other.

**Different values and beliefs:** Differing personal values could lead to conflict in the organization because the individuals in the organization are from diverse nationality, racial background, language, age, etc. According to Hart (2002), workers must learn to accept diversity in the workplace and to work as a team. Segregation in the workplace leads to gossiping, suspicion, and above all, conflict. Clashes of values and interests appears to be a commonly developed issue between engineering and manufacturing workers in an organization and this underlies conflict. Members of the engineering department for instance, might place a first-class emphasis on quality, sophisticated design and durability while members of the manufacturing department might value simplicity and low manufacturing costs. This unhealthy squabble could affect productivity, performance on target and equally hamper the morale of workers as no single individual feels very comfortable in a chaotic environment.

**Inconsistent Reward system:** Reward depicts both intrinsic and extrinsic compensation workers receive from the organization for performing their duties or executing their assigned tasks (Martocchio, 2001). In the view of Martocchio (2001), intrinsic rewards have to do with employee psychological mindsets that bring about the performance or the execution of the job/task allocated to the worker. While extrinsic reward includes those recompense inculcating both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Going by the job design theory of Hackman & Oldham (1976), workers experience positively enhanced psychological state of mind when their job rate high on five dimensions: skill variety (the extent to which the job requires a worker to perform different tasks using number of difficult skills, abilities and talents); task identity (the extent to which the worker's job is important to others); task significance (the degree to which worker's job influences impacts the lives or work of other people; autonomy (the extent to which the worker enjoys independence, freedom or discretion in deciding the methods for implementing his job; feedback (the extent to which the manager/employer gives the worker clear and direct information regarding his/her job outcomes). Presumably, workers who have the above five core job dimensions, is bound to have a high morale, be enthusiastic and vigorous in doing his job. However, a situation where the manager does selective reward system based on personal relationship or other selfish grounds, hatred, disunity and strife is bound to emerge amongst the favored workers and the ones not favored.

**Poor Leadership:** Considering the ways to empower and boost the moral of workers, a key factor is the role of the leader. Leaders find diverse and often original ways to influence their followers, one of which involves empowering leadership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). According to Randolph & Kemery (2011); Vecchio, Justin & Pearce (2010), an empowering leader is one who equips others to lead themselves and who is willing to share power and information with his/her followers. Randolph & Kemery (2011) observed that empowering leaders influence their followers in two ways: by adding value to and empowering them psychologically, and by creating leaders among followers. However, a scenario becomes the opposite whereby the leader bullies, hoards information and deals on verbal or physical violence on the workers; in such situation, morale definitely will be negatively tilted leading to hampered organizational goal and could equally lead to a conflict situation.

Leader behavior that results in conflict could include bullying, limited communication or not sharing important information, and verbal or physical violence (Rogers-Clark, Pearce & Cameron, 2009).

### **Types of conflict**

Conflict is said to be unaccountably classified in forms and structure and each brings forth its own variety of effects. Conflict could be classified as individual conflict, social conflict, economic conflict, environmental conflict, religious conflict, class conflict and international conflict. But for the purpose of this study, individual conflict is considered as the organizational interaction hinges more on individual interactions and human are the basic resource of every organization. Some different types of organizational conflict include:

**Individual Conflict:** This conflict comes in two ways: one is within individual (intra-personal or intrapsychic conflict); and the other is in between two or more individuals (interpersonal conflict).

**An intrapsychic or intra-personal conflict** is the conflict which an individual experience within his/herself. It pops up from our inner drives, instincts and values pulling against one another. According to Bradley, Klotz, Baur & Banford (2013) intra-personal conflict occurs when an individual is passing through personal stress or has a form of incompatibility in terms of choosing between two alternatives or roles available to him/her either on negative or positive outcomes for instance, choosing between two job opportunities that are equally attractive in all ramification is positively inclined. But choosing to settle for or go against offer of a good job but in a very bad location (like Sambisa Forest in Nigeria) is an intrapersonal conflict negatively inclined.

**Interpersonal conflict:** arises among two or more individuals like two managers competing for the same promotion, two executives maneuvering for a larger share of corporate capital. It could be an outcome of the problems resulting from role conflict, a condition that occurs when there is a clash over one's role in the organization (Barr & Dowding (2012). There are three facets of interpersonal conflict: disagreement, interference and negative emotions. Antecedents of interpersonal conflicts are: individual characteristics, team characteristics, project characteristics and organizational characteristics. The individual characteristics embraces personality, demographics, education and experience, institutional status, institutional role and department and needs, interests and goals. The team characteristics comprises of its size, heterogeneity, leadership, team processes including participation, influence and communication, history including previous conflicts, management styles, tactics and outcomes. The project characteristics involves the combination of system characteristics and importance, resources, time pressures and constraints, success criteria and support from the top management (Tjosvold, 2008). The institutional or organizational characteristics as an antecedent of interpersonal conflict have two dimensions; institutional culture and institutional climate.

Barr & Dowding (2012) proposed other types of relationship-based conflict which includes:

**Intragroup conflicts:** which are conflicts arising within a group or the power struggles that put individuals and groups against one another to achieve their own selfish objectives. This is made up of two categories: substantive conflict and affective conflict. Substantive conflict represents the conflict based on the nature of the task or job content issues while affective conflict on the other hand originates primarily from the group's interpersonal relations. It is associated with emotional responses aroused during interpersonal clashes.

**Intergroup conflict:** involves conflict within the group or groups. An organization is a collection of individuals and groups. As the situation and requirements demand, the individuals form various groups. The success of the organization as a whole depends upon the harmonious relations amongst all interdependent groups, even

though some intergroup conflicts in organizations is inevitable. The idea is to study intergroup behaviors within an organization so that any conflict can be recognized and dealt with by the management.

**Intra-organizational conflict** involves conflict within organizations. There are four types of intra-organizational conflict: (1) vertical conflict (2) horizontal conflict (3) line-staff conflict and (4) role conflict. Each of these types of conflict can overlap, especially with role conflict, each has distinctive characteristics. Vertical conflict refers to any conflict between levels in an organization; superior-subordinate conflict is a typical example. Vertical conflicts usually crop up because superiors attempt to control subordinates and subordinates would equally want to express their ego. Horizontal conflict refers to conflict between employees or departments at the same hierarchical level in an organization.

### **Workers' Morale Defined**

Like every other dynamic concept, the concept of morale is yet to have a generally acceptable definition (Liefoghe, Jonsson, Conway & Morgan, 2004), reason being that morale appears to be more of a feeling, rather than an action or outcome; it's difficult to measure directly (Peterson, Park & Sweeney, 2008) and a consensus is yet to be reached on whether morale is a group phenomenon, an individual experience, what antecedents of morale exists and the manifestation level of morale (Abbott, 2003).

However, despite the hitches with the literature on the right definition of morale, a pool of descriptions of what morale is has been made by diverse scholars who spelt out their various views on how best morale could be defined. The body of research examining morale spills over to the field of retail sales (Giese & Ruter, 1949); light industry (Goode & Fowler, 1949); trade unions (Rose, 1950); and utilities (Browne & Neitzel, 1952). Each of these research works applied variety of definitions of morale and several different dimension, making the consensus on one generalized meaning for morale incoherent almost impracticable literature wise. Within the management literature, the term morale is usually subsumed or seen as synonymous with job satisfaction (Hershey, 1985), job involvement, organizational commitment and group cohesion or perceptual terms like organizational climate. Evidences of these presumptions are explicit in the scholarly works of Judge & Church (2000) and Leavitt (1996). Morale also been linked to outcomes using "willingness to combat" as a rough substitution for morale (Manning, 1991:466).

Peterson, et al (2008:21) said: 'morale is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance toward the goals and tasks of a group. It subsumes confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, and loyalty as well as a sense of common purpose'. McFadzean & McFadzean, (2005:320) has it that 'Morale is the degree to which an employee exhibits a positive or motivated psychological state. It can manifest itself as pride in the organization and its goals, faith in its leadership, and a sense of shared purpose with, and loyalty to, others in the organization'. According to Arunchand & Ramanathan (2013), morale is a mental disposition which can be attributed to one's internal health and wellbeing. Ali (2013) described workers' morale as the feelings and attitudes towards one's job, work environment, team members, managers and the organization as a whole as well as an entire thought process which goes beyond people being happy to go to work each day.

This implies that workers' morale stems up in an employee's attitude towards: the organization, the work he or she is doing, their co-workers and the employers as well. Lee (2012) affirms this assertion by saying that morale touches every perspective of a company's competitive advantage. To Haddock (2010), morale refers to how employees positively and supportively feel about and for their organization. Fard, Ghatari & Hasiri (2010a) aptly stated that workers' morale plays the key role in setting a healthy work place and that high level of employee morale is linked with the employee work satisfaction, creativity and innovation, honourable mind

with the work, employee commitment towards the organization, and anxiousness to achieve group objectives beyond individual objectives, thus leading to enhance the organizational performance.

### **Indicators of morale**

Workers' morale is very influential in creating a unified and functional work environment and organizations recently focus on the performance and efficiency of the workers which indeed, depends partly on the employee's morale. Workers' morale have various indicators which encompassed variables that points out that a worker's morale is at play and evident in the outcome of the worker's work either negatively or positively. In Spreitzer & Porath (2012) opinion, vitality, learning, health, effective leadership, work/life balance, and many others are indicators of morale. Vitality represent contagious, sparking energy and productivity in others. Learning perspective implies that only a high morale employee is always interested in learning and adapting to new innovative ideas, skills and adapts to changes. Health wise, workers on high morale tend to be healthier, reporting fewer physical complaints, far fewer doctor visits and less burnout—all of which translates to lower health care costs and greater sustainability. In the aspect of work/life balance, the positive energy at work spills over into home life. And in terms of leadership effectiveness, leaders who adopt participative leadership style are bound to have a high morale/performance work force because the workers would be involved in deciding the nature of their work and how to execute them (Likert, 1961; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Ngambi (2011) equally specified that leadership approaches can influence the workers' morale.

Linz, Good & Huddleston (2006) added that expected reward is an important variable that could affect the morale of workers in an organization. In their study about Russian workers, they indicated positive relationship between expected rewards and morale among the workers and found that expected monetary rewards exhibit a greater influence on morale than expected non-monetary rewards – meaning that a worker whose expectation of a monetary reward is being dashed by the organization, is bound to be less productive due to low morale, vis-vasa. Low morale leads to increased turnover and workers' turnover causes a decrease in productivity and often contributes to low employee performance.

### **Importance of Workers' morale**

Workers' morale is of great importance. Millett (2010) states six reasons why the employee morale is important in an organization: (a) improving productivity, (b) improving performance and creativity, (c) reducing number of leave days, (d) paying higher attention, (e) providing safe workplace and (f) improving quality of work. Mazin (2010) also indicated that high worker morale leads to on-time reporting of workers for work, and improving communication, recruitment and creativity of workers. He further added that high workers' morale aids retention of workers in the organization. Workers' morale is also important because it leads to more efficient production from each employee in the sense that when employees enjoy their work environment and have a positive attitude towards their work, their production is usually higher. For the employee, higher levels of production often lead to increased compensation and promotion opportunities (Milkovich, Newman & Gerhart, 2014) while for managers, this is desirable as it assists in achieving departmental and organizational objectives/goals.

### **Levels of Morale**

Morale could be high or low in level. High worker morale arises when workers are pleased and happy with their job, the organization they work for as well as their co-workers. High worker morale can result to increased customer satisfaction and as well result to profit maximization for the organization (Vozar, 2013). Fard, Ghatari & Hasiri (2010) found that employees who work for an organization with high morale develop

higher rates of job satisfaction, creativeness and innovation, job honorability (i.e., respect for their own job), commitment to the organization, eagerness to satisfy group objectives instead of individual objectives, and they desire to improve the organization's performance. Ali (2013) further states that high employee morale is essential to success in the workplace and that morale is primarily influenced from top-down as opposed to bottom up.

Low staff morale on the other hand is an opposite of high morale. It arises when workers are not pleased or not happy with their job, the organization as well as their co-workers and even the customers (Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013). Organizational layoffs, employee conflict/disputes over contract, high level of employee turnover, unfavourable changes of leadership, and indistinct expectation and corporate direction also lead to create the low employee morale in an organization (Dorsett, 2006). Workers with low morale naturally appear less productive and exhibit undesirable attitude which can result to poor customer service, or a negative performance and behavior towards the organization (Vozar, 2013).

Workers' morale is a very essential factor in the survival, success and attainment of organizational goals. When the Morale of the workers are positively high, they prioritize their tasks efficiently so that much focus is placed on the most important and time-pressed tasks first. Armstrong (2003), productivity is a function of the time workers spend in actively carrying out the assigned task for which he was employed so as to meet up the target of the employer. By so doing, deadlines will be met, service delivered promptly, efficiency in productivity will be enhanced and good customer relationship maintained. According to Kumar & Menakshi, (2007) customers become endeared to any organization for diverse reasons comprising the timeliness with which workers accept and attend to clients bearing in mind that their clients bring about the profits and financial growth of the company.

#### **Dimensions of workers' morale**

**Enthusiasm:** The Oxford English Dictionary (cited in Stevenson & Waite, 2011), describes enthusiasm as intense and willing enjoyment, interest, or endorsement while Kunter, Tsai, Klusmann, Brunner, Krauss & Baumert., (2008:470) describes enthusiasm as "trait like, habitual, recurring emotion". Enthusiasm is a demonstration of a positive attitude and eagerness to tackle the job timely, interestingly and ever willing to learn and adapt to changes. Enthusiastic workers consistently produce meaningfully more than the job requires, repeatedly working all kinds of hours to get things done right; quests for ways to advance things rather than just reacting to management's requests; inspires co-workers to high levels of performance instead of involving in destructive arguments; and welcomes rather than resist changes. Enthusiasm for goal attainment impel workers to action, does not call for conflict, makes workers return to work even after securing injury (Shaw, Reme, Pransky, Woiszwilllo, Steenstra & Linton, 2013), makes the workers to be consistent on the job which yields trust between subordinates and managers, amongst team members, leads to increased productivity and when such trust is built, the workers/subordinates feel secure about their duties and put in his best on the job.

The policies and practices that expedite workers' enthusiasm commences with the theory of equity — the degree to which people are certain that their employer treats them with ultimate fairness, comparative to fundamental and generally accepted societal standards. Policies encroaching the privacy of the organization, group or individuals could lead to conflict and a direct attack on workers' moral. Thus, if any manufacturing company in Rivers State seeks to have enthusiastic workers, it must understand that the workers are not mere objects. A critical condition for workers' enthusiasm is a flawless, dependable and inspiring organizational purpose, innovativeness and policies that transforms workers into having the feeling to remain in the organization.

## **Vigor**

The concept of vigor is to a large extent traceable to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which posits that energy at work can be intellectualized as comprising of three aspects: physical strength in other words known as an individual's physical capabilities; emotional energy, which according to Shirom (2011:51) is described as "one's ability to express sympathy and empathy to significant others"; and cognitive liveliness which describes the workers thought processes and mental dexterity. Vigor or energy at work is also often theorized as a constituent of engagement (Shirom, Toker, Berliner, Shapira & Melamed, 2008) and in engagement literature, vigor is seen as high level of energy, a preparedness to invest effort, and mental elasticity or resilience (Sonnetag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010). Vigor denotes a high levels of energy, strength, drive and mental flexibility or resilience exhibited while working, the eagerness and ability to devote or put in effort in one's work, and perseverance even in the face of difficulties.

In theory, vigor is perceived as the contrast to emotional exhaustion (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). According to Shirom et al (2008), Vigor is a positive affective state in a work environment that mixes features of an emotion and a mood state giving rise to experience of physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive dynamism. Explaining further, (Shraga & Shirom, 2009) stated that Physical strength denotes high levels of energy in executing daily tasks; Emotional energy depicts the capability to passionately participate in dealings with clients and customers while cognitive liveliness implies a feeling of mental agility or alertness.

A worker experiencing vigor at work notices his or herself to be lively, physically brightened, cognitively fast and creative, and able to have meaningful interactions with others, carry out job loads will experience energy and liveliness with respect to their jobs; willingly engage in activities like helping others, giving advanced information to their supervisors/management when indisposed to come to work, and conscious not to take unwarranted breaks or vacations that could disrupt the attainment organizational goals. Vigor helps workers to build social connectivity in various work situations, consequently aiding prosocial behavior in the place of work. A vigorous worker distinctly represents an engaged worker; he exerts extra time, effort and initiative to contribute to the accomplishment of the business goals; they are highly involved in their jobs, go beyond their employment contractual agreement and continue with their organization for a long period of time with no effort at causing troubles that could hamper the functionality or otherwise of the organization.

## **Conflict and Workers' Morale in manufacturing companies in Rivers State.**

Conflict is highly necessary and a useful part of organizational life as it is inevitable and an integral part of the process of change. Like death, birth, choice and change, conflict is a constant aspect of life. Conflict is equally a fact of the organization especially as the workplace involves dealing with or interacting with people of diverse interests, goals, opinions, nationalities, race, age and others. And because the work place involves interaction amongst humans of varying origins, race, language, etc, any arising conflict is bound to either influence the workers negatively or positively.

The workers' morale is unequivocally diverse as morale depicts that work is not really work but a source of pride. Interpersonal conflict, often created by interdependence of people and tasks within the organization, lowers workers' morale as well as their productivity and equally drives workers away from the organization.

This is as a result of the fact that conflict could lead to anger, frustration, fear, distrust or resentment amongst workers which possibly could affect their ability to work towards the set goals of the organization. This implies that conflict affects the emotional and physical (vigor) wellbeing of the workers. This distortion in form of anger, frustration, distrust or resentment is bound to negatively tamper with the productivity level of the workers as well as their relationship with the customers which in turn will negatively affect organizational performance and objective attainment.

Morale, according to Taylor (2004), describes the degree to which workers or group in an organization pull together to attain or achieve the organizational goal/objectives. But organizational conflict is classically considered to have a negative impact on team functioning, weakening stability, disrupting the status quo and impeding productivity (Barr & Dowding, 2012). While disagreements and opposing opinions are normal or healthy, in work relationships, conflict can cost the organization employee satisfaction, productivity and financial constraints. Conflict with co-workers could also result to loss of man hour or time at work (Bell, 2002). According to Bell (2002, difficult workers who raise conflicts are classified into five: attention seekers, control players, concealers, innovative protesters and revengers. An organization filled with this class of individuals is definitely bound to have threatened or disrupted activities which will affect performance and goal attainment. Literature reveals that the worker who is satisfied with his/her job, feels himself/herself morally elevated and all this can better be viewed in the context of his/her personal attributes, behavior and relationship with others (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Dysfunctional effects of conflict include stress, sickness, reduced job satisfaction, poor communications, distrust, suspicion, impaired inter-group relations, opposition and decreased function (Marquis & Huston, 2014). In the health care environment, these outcomes are counterproductive situations which compromise patient care and safety, one's professional registration, and overall reputation of the healthcare organization according to Marquis & Huston (2014). Some of the issues which could be tantamount to morale issues in the organization include: leadership style, lack of incentive schemes, vague promotions guidelines, distribution of workers' bonuses, lack of or poor communication, unsafe work environments, discontent with salaries and unclear policies (Sankey, 2011, Dash, 2005). All these are inherent in manufacturing companies in Rivers state also.

Nonetheless, extant literature has it that positive and effective conflict management fosters reciprocal respect, improves workers working relationships, recovers worker's retention, confidence and ailments, benefits newly employed workers who may find it hard coming into long established teams (Marquis & Huston, 2014; Stanton, 2014).

### **Conflict management strategies**

Different styles of managing and resolving conflicts which includes: the avoiding, collaborating, competing, accommodating and sharing are evident for managing conflict, though depending on the situation at hand. Achieving one's own goals while ignoring the goals of others originate from the competing (Hotepo, Asokere, Azeez, & Ajemunigbohun, 2010). The indifference to the wants and needs of both the rivalries refers to avoiding. The sharing denotes the attitude in which state of cooperating or working together arises. The accommodative style implies giving significance to the needs of others over own needs (Elmagri & Eaton, 2011). While the collaborative approach is based on mutual understanding and reaching a point of common interest and win-win type of situation. In manufacturing companies in Rivers State, a sort of contingency approach applies, i.e., the very situation at hand determines what strategy could be adopted in resolving the conflict.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Conflict is an omnipresent feature at virtually every organization, manufacturing companies inclusive. The organization is made up of a harmonized or coordinated social unit, formed to operate uninterrupted in order to perform universal objectives (Freeman, 1999). Conflict is described as a process in which one party, individual, group or organization disagrees with the opinions, interests of another or put forward that its interests, welfare or benefits or privacy have been trampled upon or opposed by another, such that unhealthy rivalry emerges thereby obstructing the free flow of job performance and hinders the attainment of the organizational goals or objectives (Certo, 2013). Conflict is said to be destructive or constructive. It is destructive the degree that it's able to hinder the attainment of set organizational goals and constructive to the degree that it's occurrence is able to make the organization to adapt to positive changes, innovations and activities geared towards survival of the organization.

Workers' morale describes the overall attitude, outlook, satisfaction and confidence the worker exerts at work. When the workers are optimistic about their work environment, believes that the work environment can satisfy a great percentage of their needs like: open communication with management, provision of appropriate resources for execution of assigned tasks and effective orientation towards attainment of the general organization goal, then, morale is said to be positive. Positive or high morale boosts worker motivation, encourages teamwork, allows correctional worker positive self-image, promotes professionalism and adequate performance of assigned tasks and unifies the workers towards attainment of organizational mission. Positive morale is established from the foundation of the organization, the motivation from effective leadership, and the influence from the peer group. Negative or low morale on the other hand, has many adverse effects for the cohesion of the unit as a whole. Low morale leads to complacency and inattention to duties which is a very dangerous problem facing correctional workers (Vellani, 2001). Some other unpleasant effects of negative morale include: high turnover rate, decreased quality of work or low productivity, tardiness or lateness to work, absenteeism, increased errors, frequent accidents/injuries and abuse of sick time (Vellani, 2001). Negative morale reduces group and individual performance levels in the organization.

Contributing factors to negative morale at workplace includes but not limited to: conflicts, arguments between workers and/or management, unappreciated or underappreciated work, poor working conditions, promotion of a worker when others are ignored, supervision that is rigid, direct, demanding or excessively involved, inadequate or weak leadership or supervision that does not provided the required guidance or input, etc ,(Wittmer, 2000). Almost all the above listed constitutes the reasons for conflict amongst workers and/or between workers and management in the organization (Umiker, 1999). This and many more signifies that conflict poses irresistible impact on workers' morale either in negative parlance or positive spheres even in manufacturing companies in Rivers State. This also implies that conflict, more often than not, affects workers' morale both negatively.

Since conflict may have functional as well as dysfunctional consequences, it is of great importance that the managers explore various methods and techniques of conflict management contingent to the very pressing situation. Understanding and promoting effective conflict management strategies is of paramount importance for the growth and development of any organization. The productive transformation towards social progress can, as a rule, only succeed when the particular ability of people and managers could peacefully and constructively manage and resolve conflicts (Dupuy, 2009).

### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore recommended that managers of manufacturing companies in Rivers State should always clarify values, i.e, clear and transparent values and beliefs through briefings and communication between different levels, for every member of the company. The managers must elucidate workers' clear and transparent responsibilities, specify which employees do not act outside the scope of their duties and managers of each department should stipulate feasible tasks of workers. This will help the managers to evade conflicts caused by ambiguity and role clash and help for making clear the duties and activities of workers until the stress caused by the ambiguity and role conflict is reduced. In conflict arising from poor communications and ambiguous rules, it is recommended to reduce conflict by increasing informal communication such as joint meetings; sports venues, decision makers/leaders are recommended to clarify rules and procedures for making timely decisions and they also should review policies and guidelines that will cause managers and workers not to clash because of high ulterior motive in their activities, if necessary. For conflicts orchestrated by inconsistent evaluation and reward system, criteria and standards for payment of wages, incentives and promotions should be fair and equitable in the company.

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